

Rev. Dr. Storrs (R.S.)
STORRS (R.S.)
and signed J. M. P.

TERRORS OF THE PESTILENCE.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMS,

BROOKLYN, N. Y.,

ON OCCASION OF A

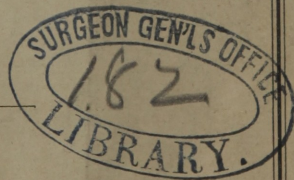
Collection in Aid of the Sufferers at Norfolk, Va.,

SEPTEMBER 30th, 1855.

BY

RICHARD S. STORRS, JR.,

PASTOR.



NEW-YORK:

PRINTED BY JOHN A. GRAY, 95 & 97 CLIFF STREET.

1855.

TERRORS OF THE PESTILENCE

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMS

PROVIDENCE, R. I.

BY

JOHN A. COLEMAN

NEW YORK

1861

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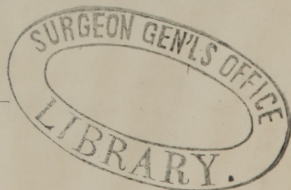
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MEMORANDUM OF THE PRESIDENT

At a meeting of the President's Council on Education, held at the White House, Washington, D.C., on the 10th day of June, 1907, the following resolutions were adopted:

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

On the subject of the Education of the People, and the importance of the same, as a basis for the improvement of the nation.

The President's Council on Education, created by Executive Order of the President, on the 10th day of June, 1907, has the honor to report to the President, and through him to the Congress, the results of its work during the past year. The Council has been organized under the leadership of the President, and has the honor to report to the President, and through him to the Congress, the results of its work during the past year. The Council has been organized under the leadership of the President, and has the honor to report to the President, and through him to the Congress, the results of its work during the past year.

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BROOKLYN, 2d Oct., 1855.

DEAR SIR :

AT a meeting of the Church, Sabbath evening, the undersigned were appointed a committee to request of you a copy of your morning discourse for publication ; and, in acquitting ourselves of this duty, we beg leave to add, that we think the discourse adapted to do good, and hope you will consent to its publication.

Sincerely yours,

Z. M. PHELPS,
JOSHUA LEAVITT,
CHARLES J. STEDMAN.

Rev. R. S. STORRS, Jr., D.D.

BROOKLYN, Oct. 4th, 1855.

GENTLEMEN :

THE Discourse which you request for publication was prepared, as you are aware, in much haste, and without the slightest reference to any use to be made of it beyond that of the pulpit, on the morning appointed for our Church-collection in behalf of the sufferers by the Pestilence at Norfolk. As you think it suited to do good if circulated more widely, through the press, and as the Church, which has the first claim on my regard, has also expressed this judgment through you, I ought not probably to oppose my own preferences to your and their wishes. I accordingly send you the discourse, to be used as you may deem best ; hoping, only, that while the treatment of the theme is necessarily inadequate, the theme itself may touch some hearts with its own impression, and lead them to contemplate, with more of reverent awe, yet with more as well of Christian faith, the great and prophetic mystery of Death.

Affectionately,

Your friend and Pastor,

R. S. STORRS, Jr.

MESSRS. Z. M. PHELPS,	}	<i>Committee.</i>
J. LEAVITT,		
C. J. STEDMAN,		

S E R M O N .

ECCLESIASTES 9 : 12.

“FOR man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.”

DEATH is an event always solemn and august. No man can clearly anticipate it for himself, no man can carefully consider it for another, without being awed by its unique and mystic grandeur. It is the point, for each of us, where eternity touches time; where the invisible and unchangeable come to instant connection with this evident and transient state of being; where our familiar experience is merged in another, untried and unterminating, and the earth is left for more remote scenes. One goes through the sharp and dark passage of death, to realms untrodden, and realities immutable. The relations of his whole existence are changed; the body and soul being parted asunder, and time, with its years, being swallowed up for him of that intense and more mighty experience, whose horologe is the soul, and its sphere infinitude.

With all the sublimity and the victory of Death, then, as the Scriptures eclaireise it to the mind of the believer, even to him

it is something unspeakable. It reaches, in its effects, above the stars ; and how shall he comprehend it ? The present ends in it, and the Hereafter begins. It hath a greatness on it, therefore, to be measured by no arithmetic which can not encompass the whole Future in its series. The very room where it takes place gathers associations new and stupendous, from the things that there transpire. A shadow from the throne of God seems to impress and pervade it, freighting its air with supernal meanings. The Infinite, which is around us unseen evermore, presses up to that room, encloses and sublimates it ; till the steps of those who walk therein almost start strange echoes, and their voices are either hushed or inspired, as of those who are moving on the verge of Eternity. It is an hour of final and immeasurable transition ; where the ages of recompense meet the days of probation ; where, changed and solitary, the soul is ushered forth to the vision of God ! That scene, however humble in its circumstances, though it thrills no palace, irradiates no landscape, nor startles the thought of any city, is really high as heaven itself ; momentous as Judgment ; significant as the soul, crowded with fates ; significant, I had almost said, as the Cross itself, which hath in that room its grandest and most moving revelation on earth.

And when the wicked man dies, in the midst of his sins, and unrepentant, that event becomes dense with a palpable darkness. It has an awfulness on it, to the thoughtful observer, above that of all material convulsions. The room where it transpires stands only one step out of hell. It holds within it the commencement of a recompense which poetry can not paint, and which prophecy can but indicate. All that is fearful in the condemnation of God, all that is awful and oppressive to the thoughts in the destiny of the lost, all that is solemn and unimaginable in a future remediless and ever-unfolding—a future which Christ himself leaves dark, unstarred by promise and unspanned by hope—the very burden of judgment,

the very secret of perdition, we touch them there! And there is then no other awfulness; not of night, with its most appalling storm; not of mountains, with their most gloomy forests, all voiceful of danger; not of oceans, in their supremest fury of elemental war; there is nothing around us, in natural phenomena, that can be more than a darkling symbol of that intense and tragic scene. Its dread apocalypse shows doom prefigured, and even commenced. The very memory of it sometimes haunts men afterwards, like a presence.

Such is DEATH, in itself; in its unalterable and singular sublimity; brief in experience, but immeasurable in relations; the inverted apex of the overshadowing Eternity. All men shrink from it, if not in fear of what it may lead to, yet in awe of its vast and unchangeable grandeur. Among all experiences confronted on earth, it hath preëminence. It is 'so high, that it is dreadful.'

And yet this event, so august in itself, is sometimes connected with conditions and circumstances, it is set in an environment, that make it more impressive still to our sensibilities, more appalling to the imagination. The condition of SUDDENNESS, for example, the fact that it comes in the midst of life, when it was not expected, how that enhances its startling power!

We shrink from any thing stern and strange, with the more prompt recoil, and the keener impression, when that confronts us near at hand, without forewarning. The early voyagers came suddenly upon Niagara, emerging from the woods, and beholding the cataract; and it was to them not only stupendous, as indeed it is to us, and to all beholders, but something awful, supernatural, surpassing speech and almost belief. 'From an immeasurable height,' the first narrators said, 'an ocean is poured over a precipice, into an unfathomable gulf. The roar shakes the forest for leagues around, and the fields for miles are wet with the spray.' They seem to have felt, these first spectators, that they had reached the curving rim of the earth

itself; where the waters from its upper side were poured over into its bosom, to be gathered there again, and sent forth to repeat their tremendous revolutions. We know what it is, before we reach it; and are prepared to be suitably and greatly impressed by it. Perhaps the first feeling of most who now see it is one rather of disappointment, even, than of such unspeakable astonishment and awe as came upon those who met it in the forest without premonition, and saw its snow-white and thunderous columns marching steadily, without intermission or rest, and with terrible power, down the 'sides of the north.' We see in it a cataract whose throbbing tides are the pulses of an almost oceanic system, embosomed in the continent. They saw in it a transcendant and unparalleled demonstration of the immediate presence and power of the Most High; a coming together of the heavens and the earth; a present representative of the elemental chaos.—So every thing which is grand, and any way appalling, is made grander and more stern to our imagination by its sudden apparition: the whirlwind or the earthquake, lightning, a wild beast, a fire in the dwelling, a storm at sea.

And so does death gather new terrors, when fronting us with sudden summons. He who has gradually, in perfect prescience of its coming, been drawing toward it through years of decline, who has patiently awaited and thoughtfully considered it, who has made his plans for it, and arranged his affairs with reference to it—it does not strike his mind at last with that peculiar and startling power which it has for another, who never anticipated it until it met him; who felt its grasp before he had thought its coming possible. To the latter, it is not surprising alone, but amazing, bewildering; surpassing thought! It is the flashing descent of the Judge, through serene heavens, on scenes unshadowed by any portents. It bursts upon the soul as the breaking of the vials of Divine retribution. It is God's hand, outstretched with sudden and irresistible sweep, and pouring destruction on all life's plans.

So the PAINFULNESS which sometimes precedes and attends death, though inconsiderable in itself, as matched against the real grandeur of the event, may add greatly to its impressiveness, as appealing to our responsive sensibilities.

The flesh will shudder when the pincers tear. Not the muscle or the nerve only, but the sensitive soul which presides in the midst of them, shrinks instinctively from pain, and would put aside its assault. To have that soul disparted from the body, no matter how easily and calmly it is accomplished, with whatever mere pause and cessation of action, the gradual and silent severance of the two, is always, as I said, a fearful thing; fearful to contemplate, fearful to meet. To have the separation accomplished through agony, that reaches and loads with its binding burden every sensitive nerve, that cripples each muscle, and withers or inflames each palpitating member—to have death thus come on us, not as one enemy, but as a swift host of incorporeal assailants, bursting upon our mortal frame, beleaguering and shattering all defenses of the life, darkening the brow, palsying the heart, wrenching each limb with its torturing gripe, making the eye-balls start with anguish, making the flesh creep and grow tight, and then loosen again, with the insufferable pain—this is more terrible! It assails the imagination with more resistless and dominating power. For the event has then the most formidable accessories. The tragedy culminates through a succession of incidents, each one of them terrific. And the whole great fact, as thus fearfully associated and thus luridly environed, confounds almost our power of analysis. With scorching stroke, it burns itself on our memories. Or, when we view it approaching ourselves, it presses against our thoughts like a tropical whirlwind, the great cloud parted and gleaming with spikes of fire; the chariot of black vapor moving forward upon wheels that grind and wither!

And yet further is this effect increased, when REPULSIVENESS OF ASPECT is added to the suddenness and the painfulness of death.

It strikes us with deep and penetrating shock, to see the form we have loved and cherished succumbing to disease, when every line and feature of that form retains its old familiar look; when the smooth hair is parted as before, in placid waves across the brow; when the dear hand, only now fainter and paler than was its wont, clasps ours with pulses that beat as they were used, with welcoming measures; and when the hot and fevered lips preserve their outline, and press back ours with quick response. Even then, the invisible, irresistible power, which bears that fragile frame into the dust; overshadows us as a spectre, and makes our hearts stand still or tremble! But when the form is frightfully changed, in limb and lineament, beneath the crushing grasp of disease; when hands that we have clasped and pressed, in utmost tenderness of love, grow purple and repulsive; when eyes whose light has been our joy, and shot its sweet and sunny splendor over all plans, have no more vision in their incrustated and blood-shot orbs; when the dear flesh that has been to us as but the fair and ivory temple of a far fairer spirit, is seamed with ridges and scarred with sores, and touched with corruption, before the coffin has closed upon it; and when the very hue of life turns to dark shadow beneath the frowning approach of death; then is that terrible, beyond all speech, beyond compare!

Affection bears up against even that change. For human love hath this true royalty, inherited from Him whose mind transcends all change, that nothing exterior can shake or stay it. But even affection feels this reverse, and can not but mourn and moan before it. In the presence of such, we own to ourselves a challenge and a shock such as no other sorrow experienced on earth, that hath not sin for its occasion, is capable of giving. In the vivid remembrance of it, recurring through years, and even tinging our dreams, we bear to the end a vast legacy of pain.—Nay, if our friends must die at all, let it be amid scenes harmonious and soothing; when morning opens

the gates of day, or sunset folds as silently again its bars of sapphire, chrysolite, and pearl ! Let our last look be answered by a smile ! Let our last touch be laid on eyes whose lids droop softly beneath the pressure, to wait the coming and wondrous Morning ! Let not the grave open amid the room where we are sitting ! Let not its breath affright the sense, before the coffin has claimed its inmate ! When this is so, all folding robes are thrown aside, and Death confronts us, not only with power superior to ours, but with skeleton form and grinning menace, the very awfulness of defiance !

Such is death, in any instance ; the death of any person ; —majestic in itself, and all the more so the more we study it, the more we measure its meaning and its relations ; appalling in its circumstances, when suddenness, painfulness, and loathsomeness of aspect, conspire to attend it ! You tell me of pecuniary losses and disappointments, of the pain that is brought to men by disarranged plans and baffled expectations, of that which flows from days of toil and nights of sleeplessness, or of that more subtle and penetrating suffering that sometimes steals like a blight upon the mind, without apparent occasion or motive, yet binding it like paralysis ; but there is nothing in all these which approaches or prefigures, or which helps us to reckon, the solitary and incomparable dreadfulness of Death, when thus approaching and thus attended ! The vastness of Eternity, the near terrors of the Grave, are both combined in that scene of his triumph ! He who has stood in the midst of it once, remembers it always as fearful and overpowering. The supernatural has come near him. Abysses have opened beneath his feet. Amid the moans of that chamber of death, with startled soul and appalled sensibilities, he hath heard deep calling unto deep !

Multiply then a scene so sad, and overwhelming to the thoughts, by scores and hundreds ; accumulate tragedy after tragedy of this kind, within one family, till father, mother,

sister, brother, alike have met that fearful end ; extend it through many families, till villages reek with the tidings of such destruction, till cities are wailing and desolate before it, till tracts of country are blasted by its march, their rivers traversed, their homesteads entered, and their forests searched ; and still remember that the import and the mystery are the same in each instance of that thick record ; that in each one Eternity has merged probation in itself, the body being crushed with sudden, painful, and loathsome stroke, and the soul sent forth to possess the Invisible ; the curtain being lifted from Judgment and the Hereafter, and the pathos or the terrible-ness of final separation from the experience of earth being realized by each ; remember this, contemplate each instance, and accumulate their multitudes, until your thought almost staggers beneath the recital—and it well may seem that over that strange and blighted spot the heavens themselves have rained swift doom ! that the trumpets of angels have heralded its fate, and the plagues whose hiding is in God's power have been opened above it !

It is a merciful provision of our Creator, incorporated inseparably by his loving wisdom with the frame of our nature, that when we are surrounded by such fierce appeals, our over-tasked sensibilities become comparatively stupefied. The eye hardly takes in the terror ; or if it does, the mind and the heart fail fully to appreciate it. But the moment we consider it intelligently, from beyond it, the long catalogue opens in perfect vividness ; and the burden of that woe seems too mighty to be borne. It broke down the pride of the Egyptian's heart, flintier than the granite, more erect than the obelisk, and more broad-based than the pyramid. It made pontiff and nobles flee from Rome in sheer terror. It steeped London in anguish, clothing its very streets in sack-cloth, and turning each sound of pleasure or of traffic to a curse or a moan. Again, and again, have nations bent to the ground in dismay ; again, and again,

has history lifted her wailing voice ; again, and again, has the heart almost of the race itself stood still, or shaken with a convulsive tremble, before such tremendous visitations of God ! The impressiveness, the awfulness of the scene have increased with each new victory of the widening pestilence. It has gathered as it extended, till nations and years were shrouded in its eclipse.

Even nature around him has seemed sometimes inarticulately but deeply to sympathize with man, in his dire extremity ; the woods to put off earlier than before their leafy coronals ; the seas to heave their stagnant tides, upon shores made sterile by the blight of the malaria ; the atmosphere almost to forget its office, and suspend its ministry, as a medium of light and an almoner of life, to grow fetid and obscure ; the brute creation to sicken or be crazed through the very vibration of man's distress. When the plague desolated Aleppo, a century ago, it was preceded by a winter so bleak and blasting that trees of of the greatest age perished with the cold, and was accompanied by such a cessation or stagnation of vegetable life, that parents devoured their children for food, or drowned them to be rid of them, and husbands sold their wives for morsels of bread. The most violent alternations and vicissitudes of climate, as if the steady frame of Nature were strangely unloosed from its usual balance, and were swinging to and fro in tumultuous oscillation, are recorded by historians as attending other pestilences of which they give the narrative. A boding gloom has seemed to darken the outward aspect of lands, and the earth to palpitate and pause in her office, while nations shrank beneath the burden of such disaster.

Undoubtedly, these are in part the occasions of the events which they attend. But it seems at times, looking back to such phenomena, as if they were rather the appropriate environment which nature herself threw around such scenes, to make their background, and to set forth through a terrible symbolism their character. Not man only has been appalled. A physical tre-

mor has shaken the solid frame of things, as the desolating progress marched on over states. And the impression of awe which both have produced, has never been fitly and adequately rendered in the marble or on canvass. Even Poetry herself has found her numbers insufficient. Men could only say with the great Grecian orator, when the plague was in Athens: 'It passeth speech; and confounds thought.'

There is still one more fact, too, to be noticed in this connection, which makes such scenes more appalling to contemplate, when we view them in simply their natural relations. It is that these deaths, the death of so many in the devastations of pestilence, while occurring amid the conditions I have mentioned, of suddenness, painfulness, and repulsiveness of aspect, COME DIRECTLY FROM INVISIBLE AND IRRESISTIBLE FORCES, the forces of the elements; and so they have no ingredient in them, at least in the general, of magnanimous self-sacrifice, and sustain no great and vital relations to the historic development and culture of mankind. The physical blight is not assumed, is not endured, for a great moral end. There is nothing of that, therefore, to remove or relieve its first aspect of dreadfulness.

Herein it is, chiefly, that pestilence differs from war in its effect, and surpasses it in dreadfulness. The scene where it rages, while awful as the other in all elements of tragedy, is less honorably connected. In war, man sacrifices himself, at least. In pestilence, he is pursued, environed, overcome, by a power around him, which he can not resist, and can not escape; to which he is exposed by no voluntary choice, and from which he can not be hidden if he would. In war, men sacrifice themselves for an end. It is to turn the balance of power; or else to preserve the existing equilibrium, among nations and realms. It is to arrest and beat back barbarism, in its meditated advance, and set forward religion and civilization; or else to defend an empire and its ideas, and give those ideas circulation and supremacy. The relations of the struggle in which these men

take part, and in which they are crushed, are therefore with the future development of the race. The blow which they strike, and in striking which they confront the enginery of death, resounds through all the corridors of time. History records it, History *feels* it, throughout her frame, and will feel it for ever. The masses in such a struggle act under their leaders, yet something of this may mingle even in their thoughts. The leaders, so far as they are thoughtful and principled, comprehend these relations, and act in view of them. They are consciously planted on the topmost points of present human action ; and they meet the perils and terrors of the position for an end that overshadows them. The trenches, in which they thickly fall, form the channels, and turn the currents, of national destinies. The battlements which they scale, mark the boundaries of eras. The death which they challenge has a front illumined by the splendor thrown on it from coming centuries. They go to it cheerfully, because its iron hand holds garlands, and its fingers turn the leaves of destiny.

When populations fall beneath the stroke of the pestilence, all this is otherwise. In silence and without historic relations, that process of death goes swiftly forward. They who fall, turn no tides of noxious influence back on their source. They inaugurate no powers to cheer the world. But all is still, appalling destruction. Insatiate death consumes their life, and there is no result or issue.—While war, therefore, is terrible, the pestilence hath a bleaker and more unrelieved aspect. The event is the same ; the suddenness, painfulness, repulsiveness, scarcely less. But in the one, death is sought and greeted, or at least is self-incurred. In the other, it drops as a blight out of the air. In the one, it is a sacrifice, on the part at least of many, on the altar of national advancement and welfare, or of moral transformation. In the other, it is simply an inevitable surrender, to forces that can not be evaded or resisted, that grow more stern and violent by their victory, and that leave no trace save of anguish and blight.

There have come to us the past week the news of the destruction of thousands of human lives, in the final assault upon a city of the East.* It is fearful to think of that! 'Fire, and blood, and the vapor of smoke,' arise before our minds as we look that way; the sea impurpled with streams of blood, that mingle their currents with its surf; the blazing ruins of what have been palaces, overstrewn with crushed and mangled bodies; every flash of the rifle, along the front of the advancing troops, betokening scores and hundreds of deaths; every bursting of the bomb-shell laying desolate a home; each ditch a grave for ranks of men; each rampart a monument, for assailants and besieged. The sea that girds that rocky coast will not wash itself white from the memory of that slaughter, while its tides continue to heave and sink. The ruins of the town will tell the tale to after years. A hundred thousand hearts, all over Europe, on which those charging armies trampled, will shudder long when they think of Sebastopol!—Yet over all this arises the thought that there, upon the high places of the earth, a new page hath been opened in the history of nations. The echoes of that tremendous event will reverberate not over Europe alone, but over Asia as well. Its influences will follow them, as far as they go. It makes our missionaries safer to-day in Erzerum and Mosul. It hinders the march of a false church upon Turkey. It preserves Hindostan for a Protestant Christianity. And China and Japan shall feel the invisible but mighty pressure of those vast circles of quickening or restricting and monitory movement which this event originates on earth.

The death, then, of those who were enveloped in this slaughter, has historical relations. The ends that were struggled for take something from its awfulness; suffuse it, in a measure, and partially subdue it, by the light of their significance. Future ages may tell that in that terrific and protracted bombard-

* The news of the successful assault of the Anglo-French army upon Sebastopol, reached New-York, September 27.

ment, that headlong rush of two great armies against the stony shield of an empire, the door was finally barred and bolted on Northern aggression. And the life which it cost may thus become illustrious in history, and be inseparably and vitally incorporated with the development of the race.

While this tremendous scene was advancing, there went on another, not far from us, less showy and conspicuous, but, in proportion to its extent, more awful still. On the northern bank of the Elizabeth river, in that ancient commonwealth the first settled of our Confederacy, within a town fronting a harbor commodious and safe beyond most others, a town whose families have been refined, their hospitalities liberal, and their society charming almost to a proverb, the Pestilence had commenced its desolating work. Matron and maiden, the husband and the son, the physician to the body and the physician to the soul, those of all ranks in life, of either sex, and of every age, the child and the grandparent, the slave and his master, alike were falling beneath its power. In private houses and in hospitals, in all places of usual public resort, in the streets and in the court-house, in the forest and in the fields, in the very sanctuaries of God, men met the descent of the invisible destroyer. No physical habit, no mental equipment, and no moral state, brought rescue or release. The loveliest form turned loathsome and expired. The manliest frame shook down like a tree decayed at the heart, under the whirlwind, before that strange, appalling onset. Childhood forgot its smile and bloom. Old age was not spared for the calm steps of decline. The chief officers of the city, the nurses and attendants, the distributors of charity and the ministers of Christ, all sank together, with those whom they assisted, into one death, to be buried together in one broad grave. The very fish along the shore, according to one account, were tossed upon the beach, dead and decayed. Birds left the air; and all the streets were swarming with foul flies, the insect attendants of the

terrible plague! Death was on every hand, in his austere and gloomiest aspect, his sternest panoply of assault and destruction.—And yet, as each one died in turn, as families disappeared, absorbed into the grave, as streets became silent, and fields missed the husbandman, as ships became charnel houses, and cemeteries grew crowded, there were no other than sad relations attending the event. No forces ran out from it, moulding, exalting, or regenerating history. No pressure was lent by it to the progress of society. No blow was struck by it, on barbarism, idolatry, and old decay. No light was shot along national annals. It was all an inevitable and promiscuous destruction, unrelieved by any such moral relations; the trampling of so much life from earth, with fearful certainty and more fearful celerity, amid terrific and appalling phenomena, without recall.

It was, then, in fact, more dreadful than the other. For while the numbers, on any comparison, were inconsiderable in the tragedy of Norfolk, its central gloom was touched and parted by no meanings or relations, gilding its darkness. In all his might Death there had sway; and the world reaped no advantage from it! War, Pestilence, and Famine! Yes, that is the order. War dreadful, but Pestilence more so; and Famine the last in the stern series, as fullest and most searching in its ministry of anguish! How truly may men say, in the view of such scenes, or amid their visitation, while looking upon them as natural events, unconnected with consequences which God's eye may see, but which ours can not—how truly may they say, with the preacher of old: "For man also knoweth not his time; as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in a snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them"! There is no escape in that contest with Death; no order in his assault; no resisting of his onset; and no monument, but the grave, of his coming, and his victory!

I think, my friends, that we may properly be reminded, by

this train of thought, of the vast, the oftentimes terrific efficiency of INVISIBLE FORCES, in the system around us ! How they encompass us on every hand, embosoming our being, and limiting our life !—There burst no red artillery upon Norfolk, when the pestilence commenced there. No tremor shook the firm ribs of the earth ; and no canopies of overhanging and thunderous gloom rushed up the heavens. The air was smiling and calm as ever ; the fields as green, the scenery as sweet, as when each day came freighted with new pleasures, and business and friendship walked hand in hand along the streets. No frowning fleet, with armory of curses, invested the town. But one peaceful merchant-ship, unconscious of its burden, bore the principle of disease into the roadstead. The miasm was let loose by invisible exhalation. And every drop of that clear air became envenomed. It turned into a fang, and smote with stroke deadly as the assassin's. The midday heat, the midnight darkness, each in its turn played down like the consuming lightning on those devoted and shrieking streets. The fields forgot to yield their increase. The ploughman's team stood in the furrow. The carpenter's axe paused in mid-stroke. Bells tolled their sadness, till all the hours were reckoned by their dirge, and then were mute. The commonest offices of life became occasions of direst peril. Relationships were fatal. All intercourse with others took the potency of suicide. The instant judgment of the nation, the simplest instinct of self-preservation, took up that doomed and poisoned port, and put it aside, not from the thoughts of men, their prayers, their alms, but from their travel, their intercourse, and their traffic, lest its great woes should rain on them. It was marked out and shunned, as the very leper of the land ; the vast lazaret-house, filled and surcharged with plague and sorrow. And so it has stood, from that day to this, the dreaded centre thronged with ills, from which a thousand radiating lines have carried the tidings of misery and of blight to every village.

Yet all this deadliness lurked in an influence so fleeting and inponderable that no instrument has detected, and no analysis resolved it. Death came without observation or heralding, yet he compassed men like an atmosphere, and made each inlet of the frame his entrance. And what is now hoped for to arrest his advance, to quench these raging fires of fever, and make calm health take the place of their fury, is no costly drug, or rare mineral element, brought from afar; it is not the skill of men most eminent, or the sudden bursting upward of a fountain of life through the fields so barren, and the streets so stricken. It is the coming of one still night, which a breath from the north shall make cold enough to whiten the dew upon the grass! That shall be more to Norfolk and its sufferers than a hundred gold mines poured out upon its streets, or a thousand physicians and surgeons convened there.

Verily, then, how vast and mighty these silent forces that work around us! What a system it is, of interlocked powers, invisible but portentous, amid which we move! How easily might some of them be marshalled for our destruction!

HOW CONSTANT OUR EXPOSEDNESS! This is the second thought suggested by the theme.—What shall bar out from us such pestilence; not this particularly, but others, its equals in power and effect? Can all quarantines push back these hosts, that are born in the atmosphere, and that ride on winds? Can any interior sanitary regulations give a guarantee against influences which may be at the same time in the palace and in the cellar, in the warehouse the school-room, the workshop, and the church? Have not we ourselves seen, in our own time here, that terrific epidemic which again and again has belted the earth with its zone of death, and made appalled nations spectators of its power, coming into our cities, against all resistance, assailing our neighbors, overwhelming all skill, overriding all distinctions, mingling the richest and the poorest together in a common alarm and a common bereavement, perhaps desolating

with sudden stroke our own families, and making the pavement resound each hour with the steps of the mourners and the roll of the hearse? How strikingly, then, was this lesson emphasised, which now is repeated by a voice more distant! The blue summer-skies, from their undisturbed depths, dropped death like rain. The placid earth, that seemed only waiting the advent of harvest, took bodies to its bosom as the ocean drinks showers. The sea rippled as brightly as ever around our docks, yet ships beside them weltered in sickness, and opened all their ports to death, till the very breath of them became a fresh agent of destruction! Men raised the window, and death came in. They walked the streets, and he joined them at the corners. He met them in their business, put up the shutters, padlocked the door, and drove home with them, before a single plan for him was made. They fled abroad, but no rail-car outran him. They hid themselves at home, and their very rest was their ruin.

How easily might this be so again! How easily may it be! What hinders it now? Not waiting harvests, or coming winter; for the fierce epidemic has laughed at both these. Only the word of God restrains it; and that word only his kindness speaks.—Let us daily recognize then this daily exposure. We wonder how men live at the base of volcanoes; beneath the cloudy or lurid pennon that tells of fires struggling beneath, from the depths of the earth. We live every moment in the midst of an atmosphere, whose every drop, by some slight change, might on the instant be loaded with poisons, its motion become a desolating march, its pause a conquest of families and cities. The train is laid on every hand. One pestilential spark might kindle it to-morrow, and fill our eager and populous scene with clouds more dread than those which wrapped Pompeii in their shroud, or which now weave their glowing and swift desert-dance around the terrified caravan. How good to remember, amid such exposures, that God holds all

these powers in his hand! Yet how wise to be prepared to meet and greet Death, whenever he shall come!

An impulse to GRATITUDE seems spontaneously to associate itself with the theme we have considered.—Not upon us hath fallen thus suddenly this “evil time”; but One hath spared us, and he is God! Let emotions of gratitude swell our hearts then, and songs of praises fill our lips, as we regard our peaceful homes; as we walk church-ward with cheerful steps, in the midst of our groups of friends and children; as we turn homeward, to recount God’s mercies and ponder his ways. So oft as we remember those other homes, and equal sanctuaries, from which whole families have departed for ever, or from which, in scores and multitudes of cases, the parents have been torn in anguish from the children, or the children from the parents, let us say it in our words, let us feel it in our hearts, let us show the great impression of it on our life: ‘Verily, God hath been merciful to us! And with songs of thanksgiving, and lives of worship, we should offer him our praise!’

And an impulse to CHARITY, in every true heart, will be as spontaneously inspired by the theme.—It is the one redeeming feature of such visitations, so sad and admonitory, that they call out the warmest sensibilities of our nature, renew our sense of human brotherhood, and make us prompt and eager to relieve. Let us, each one, extract this lesson of light from the dread chapter of disaster, and pluck this blossom from the thorny stalk! While admonished of our exposure, and grateful for our release, let us extend to those whom our Father hath so smitten, so suddenly and terribly, the open hand of Christian kindness! They are our brethren, by race; our brethren, by historic recollections and affinities; by a common literature, a common religion, and a common renown. They are confederate with us in this Empire of States, and are heirs with us to all its future! They call now for our aid. Widows, weeping over unburied husbands; children, mourning the want of all things,

and yet only half alive to their disaster ; friends, and kindred, whose pleasure and their hope are quenched in tears ; the sick recovering, or rapidly sinking ; the strong exposed ; the African, dependent ; the American, scarcely less so ; ALL call with an eloquence more powerful than words for our swift succor ! Let us not be found wanting to this appeal ! Let us not be found sluggish ! Call up the vision of that compact and cheerful town, whose pleasant homes offered so lately a welcome to the pilgrim and a shelter to the sailor, now scarred by pestilence in every street, its houses desolate, its markets still, its port deserted, its industry hushed, the mourners going about the streets, the mounded graves surrounding it like ramparts, its leisure pain, its business disease, its gaiety death ; and all the reasons for your prompt sympathy, for your most warm and generous aid, will rise before you ! As great as our Gratitude, let our Charity be ! as copious as our blessings ! as searching and quick as their distress ! So Christian grace, and the highest of all, shall thrive in us through their distress ; and, striking hands over seas with the sufferers, we shall say, “ We are brethren ! ”

Finally, my friends, let each of us remember that Death, in all his power and sternness, his control over life, and his portents of destiny, is waiting near for all the living, for you and me.—The circumstances of his coming we may not know ; its certainty we are sure of. To all, to each, it momentarily draws nigher. And when it comes, it shall be to us just what it hath been to all who have met it ; the same august and solitary change ; the opening on our eyes of the vast Unseen ; the completion of time, the revelation of Eternity ; the installation of the soul amid unchangeable destinies ; the confronting of Judgment ! Some room shall be overshadowed to us by the opening Immensity ! Some hour for us shall show the merging of time in the Infinite ! The manliest man can not resist it. The delicate woman can not avoid it. The child must meet it.

God help us so to live and act, to assure ourselves of his favor, to lay up our treasures amid His palaces, to appropriate the Salvation which Christ hath brought us,—which is grander in its renewal than Death in his destruction, more prophetic of glory than the grave is of gloom, and mightier in its promise than the Pestilence in its terror,—that when that last hour comes to us, its advent shall be welcomed ; our death becoming our immeasurable gain ; its very agony but our chariot of transition ; and its conquest of the body, the soul's consummate victory ! Then, in those realms above the stars, where days are ages, and where night never comes, where the vision of God shall be ours for ever, the “evil time” shall have all passed by, and we shall meet the fruition of hope, the fulfilment of prophecy, when “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain ; FOR THE FORMER THINGS ARE PASSED AWAY.”

